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THE  
ELEMENTS  
OF  
BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION.

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Works on  
Bible





THE ELEMENTS

OF

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION,

CONTAINING A BRIEF

EXPOSITION OF THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

AND

RULES OF THIS SCIENCE.

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# BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION.

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## SECTION I.

### INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

I. **IGNORANCE** of the principles and rules of interpretation, is one of the greatest obstacles in the way of obtaining a correct knowledge of the Bible. Language is a medium of communication between man and his fellow man. Through this medium the thoughts, desires, and determinations of one mind are made known to another. God has made communications to the world, and in condescension to human weakness, has made these, by the instrumentality of human language. He did not form a new language to be the medium of communication between himself and his creatures, but made use of that already formed and in use by men. Neither did he construct this language anew to make it answer his purpose; he took it just as it was, and used it just as he found it, for the benevolent purpose of instructing his creatures in the way of life and salvation. In the earlier ages of the world he found the Hebrew in use, and he then made his communications in that: In later times, the Hebrew being less generally understood, and the

Greek more generally known, he made his communications in Greek. Having made his communications once, he leaves them to be studied and interpreted by his subjects; to be studied in the same manner in which we study other writings, and to be interpreted by the same rules.

Those who are not acquainted with the original languages, may still have the benefit of this blessed volume translated into their vernacular tongues, by learned and pious men. Translations are made into almost all modern languages, which are extensively used, and many of them are made with the greatest possible care, and by men equally distinguished for their learning and piety. Our common translation was not only made with the greatest care, by men of distinguished learning and piety; but it has received the approbation of a long list of worthies of all orthodox denominations of Christians.

2. But in whatever method the fountain of divine truth is approached, we ought to be mainly anxious to drink of its healing waters. Whether we read the sacred Scriptures in their original or in our own vernacular tongues, we ought to be careful to understand them aright.

The truths of the Bible can do us good only as far as we understand and apply them. Just as far as we misunderstand the Bible, and mistake its meaning, we lose the benefits which it is designed to convey, and subject ourselves to the evils it was intended to correct.

While a right understanding of the Bible is admitted by all candid and intelligent students of it, to



be of incalculable benefit and of inestimable value; and while so many loose and erroneous, and contradictory views are entertained on the subject of its communications, it is truly surprising that biblical interpretation has not been more generally a subject of investigation and inquiry.

Other branches of knowledge have received at least a share of public attention; this has by the multitude been almost entirely overlooked and neglected. Indeed it is hardly known by many a fierce religious disputant and wrangler in our land, that there is any such science as that of Biblical Interpretation.

But though neglected by the common people, believers and unbelievers, the most accurate biblical scholars have devoted to it a large share of their attention. In the seats of learning, and by the most successful cultivators of biblical knowledge, it has been studied with increasing interest and benefit, both to themselves and the world with whom they communicate.

Lectures and other scientific instructions are given on this subject in our best theological seminaries, and the ablest expounders of God's word are devoting themselves to this study with singular assiduity and zeal.

3. An essay on the subject of biblical interpretation briefly explaining its fundamental principles and rules, and presenting them to view in their mutual relations and dependences, has long been needed and desired by at least a respectable portion of the Christian public. There is nothing of this kind in circulation at present in this country. Prof. Stuart's trans-

lation of Ernesti is not adapted to interest and instruct the general reader, though deeply interesting to the accurate classical and biblical scholar.

4. In the present elementary treatise an endeavor has been made to exhibit the fundamental principles and rules of biblical interpretation, in such a manner, as to place them within the reach and comprehension of every intelligent reader of the English language. These rules are accompanied with such illustrations and examples, as will sufficiently evince their truth and show their application. The system of interpretation which is taught in this essay, is substantially the same as that of Ernesti; technical expressions however are generally avoided, as being ill adapted to instruct the great body of the Christian community for whose benefit this essay is more particularly designed.

5. In applying the following rules of interpretation to the Bible, it is to be remembered, that the holy word of God is to be approached with the profoundest reverence. Rash and hasty judgments are not for a moment to be tolerated in relation to those vitally important subjects, which the Bible unfolds to our view. Here, if any where, when examining this blessed book if ever, we are to proceed with deliberation, and judge with candor and caution. How much is lost by a neglect to do this, no tongue can tell, no pen describe, no pencil paint. Much of the error in faith and practice, with which the world is flooded, may be traced to this prolific source; men leap to their conclusions on religious subjects, before they well understand the premises; and those conclusions are such

as suit their own misguided fancy, whether they can be educated from the word of God by fair means or foul.

Many undertake the study of the Bible with their ultimate conclusions all predetermined. They look into it, not to hear all that God is pleased to say, for the purpose of deterring them from sin, and exciting them to seek holiness and heaven; but to see what they can find, to establish themselves in this and that favorite opinion. That such persons should make much progress in sound scriptural knowledge is not to be expected. They do not labor to correct their errors and enlarge their views, a work which cannot be accomplished without labor. They only strive to confirm themselves in their preconceived opinions: in that they generally succeed, no matter how absurd those opinions may be.

6. Let the work of Biblical Interpretation be undertaken with honesty and humility. Human opinions are an empty sound, and even learning is a vain show when arrayed against the truths of the Bible.

Truth will stand; it is destined to a glorious and universal triumph. It will bless and comfort all those who hold it in righteousness. It has outlived the scoffs of the most heaven-daring infidels. The mists of scepticism cannot conceal and essentially darken it, the storms of persecution have been unable to sweep it away. Woe to the man who lifts up his puny hand against divine truth. In doing this, he rebels against God, and treasures up wrath against the day of wrath to be poured out upon his guilty soul.

Joy to that man who is on the side of truth. Truth will be on his side. If he has taken the part of truth against an angry and unbelieving world, truth will take his part against all that may threaten to disturb his peace and destroy his soul. By God's truth he shall be sanctified, and being sanctified shall enjoy a blissful eternity with him, whose words are truth, whose favor is life, whose loving-kindness is better than life.

The work of biblical interpretation is easy to the candid, attentive and prayerful inquirer. By such the principles and leading rules of this interesting science, will be readily apprehended. To the captious and caviling, they will be more difficult of acquisition; but yet, I do not despair of affording them some aid, if they will patiently examine the subject by the light of their good common sense, to see if these things are so.

## SECTION II.

### THE RULES OR LAWS OF INTERPRETATION.

#### WHAT IS FIRST TO BE DONE.

1. The first business of an interpreter is to determine the meaning of words. No communication can be correctly understood or explained, without an accurate knowledge of the meaning of the words in which it is expressed. If one or more important words of a communication are misapprehended and wrong ideas attached to them by the reader or hearer, the communication will be so far misunderstood and wrongly interpreted. Language cannot be correctly interpreted without the most careful attention to words, for the purpose of ascertaining their precise meanings. Negligence here is the cause of many errors, and is of itself highly criminal ; and yet we are not unfrequently guilty of it to a very high degree in the study of the Bible, the most important, and in some respects the most difficult, of all studies.

#### 2. DEFINITION OF THIS SCIENCE.

Interpretation is the science which teaches how to ascertain and explain the true meaning of language.

All intelligent persons are more or less familiar with the art of doing this, though few have ever studied minutely its principles. The interpretation of language is so intimately connected with the use of it, that every man is compelled to make himself in some measure master of the art. And yet no man can be completely master of this, any more than of any other art, without an accurate acquaintance with its principles and rules.

### 3. GENERAL PRINCIPLES RELATING TO THE MEANING OF SINGLE WORDS.

1. Every word has some meaning either of itself, or else as qualifying the meaning of other words and pointing out their mutual relations and dependences. The only use of words is to stand for ideas and to serve as a medium for communicating them; if therefore any word had no meaning, it would be entirely useless.

The meaning and power of words is determined by usage and custom. There is necessarily a kind of general agreement among those who use any particular language, that particular words shall stand for particular ideas and objects. Thus man, time, earth, heaven, &c., stand for particular objects, and designate them in distinction from all others, by the general consent of those who use the English language.

2. Most words have more than one meaning, or admit of some modifications of the general idea for which they stand.

Thus heat denotes, first, a substance which exists in the natural world, and which enters into the com-

position of natural bodies; secondly, the sensation produced by that substance on the animal frame; thirdly, animal excitement, ardor.

So the word spirit denotes, first, animal excitement, ardor; as when we say of soldiers, they fought with great spirit; secondly, the soul of man or of other creature, an incorporeal thinking being; as when we speak of the spirit of man going upward to God at death, when we say that God is a spirit, that he maketh his angels spirits, &c.; thirdly, temper, disposition; as when we say of a man, that he showed a good spirit or a bad spirit, meaning evidently, that he showed a good or bad disposition or state of mind, a good or bad temper.

Most if not all the principal words in our language as well as those of other languages, have more than one meaning; or at least some diversity of signification growing out of the same general idea.

The different meanings of the same word are connected together by some general relations, such as similarity, the relation of cause to the effect, and effect to the cause, &c.

The fact that many words have more meanings than one, deserves special consideration. Many persons too often overlook it, and having proved that a word sometimes and in some connections, has a particular meaning; infer that it must at all times and in all places have the same meaning. Such pretended proof is entirely fallacious. The fact that a word has one particular meaning in one connection and in relation to one subject, is no proof at all, that it has the same

meaning in a different connection and in relation to a different subject.

In view of this subject it is obvious that an interpreter ought to familiarize himself with all the different meanings of important words, in order to be fully qualified for the business of interpretation. Otherwise he will be in great danger of mistake, in applying the meanings he is familiar with, where others were intended to be conveyed.

3. No word has more than one meaning in one and the same place. Though it may have twenty meanings in different places, it can have but one of them in any one place. The correctness of this proposition will appear from a careful inspection of any part of language, and from a consideration of its very nature. When I use a particular name to designate a particular object, I wish it to be understood as standing for that object and no other. If either of the principal words of a simple sentence had two meanings, that sentence would express two simple ideas; if two of them had two meanings at the same time, that sentence would express four simple ideas. A language constructed on this principle would be in the highest degree confused. It would be an anomaly among the languages of the earth, and entirely unfit for the purposes of social intercourse and instruction.

4. As many words have different meanings, the question naturally arises, how shall we determine which of those meanings is intended in any particular passage?

*Answer.* The most common meaning is always to be chosen where the nature of the subject or context



does not clearly indicate another. Where different meanings are equally common, the nature of the subject or context must always decide which are to be taken. Thus in the sentence, "God is a spirit;" we have the word spirit, which is used in different senses. The nature of the subject clearly indicates which of the meanings is intended here; namely that God is an incorporeal thinking being. The other meanings of this word, though common, would not suit this passage at all, and therefore we with propriety infer that they could not have been intended by the author of the declaration.

5. Most words are capable of being used figuratively to express different ideas from those to which they are ordinarily applied. A word is used in a figurative sense when it is applied to some object or action of which it is not the proper name. Thus we say that anger burns, sin is a venomous disease, where burns and venomous disease are used figuratively, and the meaning is, that anger is excited, and that sin is like a venomous disease in its effects.

The most important figurative expressions and those which occasion most difficulty to the interpreters, are included under the following heads, the Metaphor, the Allegory, and Metonymy.

A metaphor is a word expressing similitude without any expressed sign of comparison; as God is a consuming fire; meaning that God is like a consuming fire, in certain particulars. Metaphorical expressions are very common, both in the sacred Scriptures and in other writings.

An allegory is a continued metaphor. It differs from a metaphor only in being drawn out to a greater length. As there is an implied comparison in every metaphor, so in an allegory the subject of discourse is illustrated by a familiar representation of something else resembling that subject in some of its properties or circumstances. The 80th Psalm contains one of the most beautiful allegories in the language. It commences in the 8th verse and ends with the 16th.

“Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt,  
Thou hast cast out the heathen, I planted it  
Thou preparedst room before it,” &c.

In this allegory God's chosen people are compared to a vine, and by the description of this supposed vine, several facts in their history are forcibly brought to mind and illustrated. The parables of the New Testament are allegorical representations in which the familiar incidents of common life are made to illustrate important religious truths.

Metonymy is the use of one word for another, as cause for effect, whole for a part, container for contained, &c. As “he bare our sins in his own body on the tree”; that is bare the effects or penalty of our sins. “As often as ye drink of this cup,” that is of the liquor contained in it; “There went out to him all Judea and Jerusalem and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him”; that is, there went out all the people of Jerusalem, Judea, &c.

6. The design of figurative language is to illustrate, embellish and enforce. It is of very great utility in contributing both to the copiousness, beauty, and

force of language ; and renders it a much more perfect vehicle of thought, than it could otherwise be. Some writers use figurative language more sparingly than others. Poetry abounds more in figurative language than prose. The oriental writers generally use figurative expressions in greater profusion than those of other nations. The sacred Scriptures abound in figurative language more than almost any other writings of equal extent. On this account the biblical interpreter ought to be well acquainted with the principles of figurative language and the laws by which it is to be interpreted.

#### 4. HOW TO DISTINGUISH LITERAL FROM FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE.

1. The literal meaning of words is never to be departed from without evident reason and necessity. To interpret words on all occasions in figurative senses, because they are sometimes or indeed often used so, would be one of the grossest abuses of language, and the most entire perversion of reason. An intelligent writer does not introduce figurative expressions in such a way, as to leave room to doubt whether they are figurative or not. That a word will admit of being interpreted in a figurative sense is not a sufficient reason for interpreting it so. It ought not to admit of a different interpretation, without evident violence being done to the language, in order that its claim to be considered figurative may be made good. Such is always the case with figurative language. It cannot without manifest violence being done to it, be interpreted literally.

2. Words are to be considered figurative, when there is manifest incongruity between the subject spoken of, and the affirmation made respecting it; as when corporeal and incorporeal, animate and inanimate, rational and irrational, &c. are conjoined. Thus Christ says of himself, "I am the true vine," "the living bread;" here is a conjunction of animate and inanimate. "Wisdom crieth without;" crieth expresses the act of a living agent and is applied to wisdom, which is inanimate, by a figure of speech called personification. Anger burns or is kindled; here is a conjunction of anger an incorporeal object, with burns, which expresses the state of a corporeal or material object. Whenever an expression would be manifestly false or absurd, if understood literally, and makes a good sense if understood figuratively, we are to consider it figurative. Thus Christ said of the sacramental bread, "this is my body." This declaration, if understood literally, would be false and absurd. No logic could make out, that bread is identical with a living human body, and such was the body of Christ, when he made the declaration referred to. But if we consider bread as being a figurative representation of the Redeemer's body, the sense of the passage is good, agreeing both with the subject and context. We therefore conclude that it is figurative; and so of like expressions generally.

3. A word is frequently known to be used in a figurative sense, by a definitive clause, expressing in a literal sense the idea intended to be conveyed by the figure. As in the sentence, "We being dead in trespasses and sins," &c. dead is known to be used in a

figurative sense, by the phrase in trespasses and sins, which indicates literally the kind of death intended, and shows the word to be used in a figurative and not in its literal sense.

4. When different words and those of different significations, are applied to the same subject, though that subject is an unknown one, we may justly infer that some of them at least are to be understood figuratively. Thus the change that takes place in becoming a Christian, is called being born again, being converted, renewed after the image of God, &c. some of which must of course be figurative representations of that change.

5. When the same words or those of similar import are every where in the Bible, used in reference to any particular subject, though that subject is otherwise an unknown one, we may infer that they are to be interpreted literally. Thus the future punishment of the wicked is represented by various terms and forms of expression, all of which unequivocally denote suffering; we therefore infer that punishment will literally be inflicted. The doctrine of the resurrection of the body at the last day stands on a foundation equally firm. It is referred to in various passages of Scripture, and by various modes of expression, but all indicating the same thing and expressing substantially the same idea. Thus resurrection of the dead, of the body, being quickened or made alive, are expressions constantly used, in reference to an event to take place at the end of the world.

This rule is one of very general application and of great practical importance in relation to such subjects

as do not come within the sphere of our observation, and for a knowledge of which, we are indebted solely to divine revelation.

## 5. HOW TO ASCERTAIN THE LITERAL MEANING OF WORDS.

1. The meaning of words is determined by custom and general usage as we have already had occasion to remark. As far as any individual departs from this usage in the expression of his ideas, his communication becomes obscure, and his language incorrect. No intelligent writer intentionally departs from it without what he supposes to be good reason for doing so, and explicitly pointing out how far he does it.

The correct and true meaning of words as they are generally understood by those who use them, is that which every intelligent writer expects to be understood as expressing. This he aims to express, and to this, he endeavors to adhere. In relation to this subject, the sacred writers are to be placed at least on an equality with others. They have not used language with less accuracy and propriety than intelligent uninspired writers.

2. The first and simplest means of ascertaining the meaning of words, is by definition. In giving the definition of a word a man gives his individual testimony in favor of that meaning, or those meanings, which he assigns, being the true meaning or meanings of the words. Such testimony is to be estimated like all other testimony, and is more or less valuable, according to the character of the witness. When a writer defines his own terms, they are of course to be interpreted in

his writings according to his definition of them, unless he manifestly departs from it. Writers generally define such terms as they think will not be well understood by those for whom their works are designed, without definitions.

Dictionaries are highly useful to the student and interpreter, in exhibiting the principal meanings of words as they were understood by their respective authors. They ought to be constantly consulted as repositories of valuable knowledge on this subject.

3. The nature of the subject treated of, affords very essential service in limiting and defining the meaning of words. When words have different meanings, we generally infer from the nature of the subject, which of those meanings is to be taken in any particular passage. The facility with which we do this is truly remarkable, and affords us just occasion for wonder and admiration. Notwithstanding that most of the words we use have different meanings, yet we discover almost intuitively, which of the meanings is intended in any particular application of them. So that language may be considered almost as definite, as if every word had its own definite signification and no other. The definiteness and precision of language, taken in connection with the indefiniteness of meaning belonging to single words, may well be accounted among the wonders of literature.

4. Words are often illustrated and explained by examples, where there is no logical definition, and where the nature of the subject would not be sufficiently clear to afford a clue to the true meaning. Examples illustrative of the meaning of words, are common

in almost every kind of writing, and deserve the particular attention of every student and interpreter. Thus we learn the meaning of the word prayer as much from the examples of the performance of this duty recorded in the Bible, as from any other source. The same may be said of piety, faith, repentance, and many other of the most important terms, in which the divine will is treasured up, and by which it is made known to men.

5. A comparison of parallel passages, together with a careful attention to the context, is another and effectual means of eliciting the true meaning of some words, which could not be otherwise ascertained. Those passages of the sacred Scriptures are parallel, which manifestly relate to the same subject and express similar sentiments. The same sentiment may be expressed in different terms, in two or more passages, but more definitely and perspicuously in some passages than in others. The same fact is sometimes related in two or more different passages, and related more fully in some than in others. A comparison of parallel passages is one of the most effectual means of acquiring an accurate and extensive knowledge of the precise and accurate meaning of many of those words, by which the doctrines and duties of religion are taught.

The parallel passages on prayer are those which relate to the subject of prayer, and explain and enforce the duty; those on the day of final judgment, are those which relate to the subject of a final judgment, and describe the nature and circumstances of it, &c.

Care ought to be taken to determine whether the passages which we examine as parallel, are truly so or not. There may be a mere verbal parallelism, when



the subjects treated of are entirely different. In this way multitudes suffer themselves to be bewildered and deceived. By considering passages of Scripture which relate to the final judgment, parallel to those which relate to the infliction of temporal judgments, multitudes have endeavored to explain away the doctrine of a final judgment, to the very great detriment of religion. So by considering passages of Scripture which relate to the subject of the future punishment of the wicked, parallel to those which relate to the infliction of temporal punishment, many have endeavored to explain that doctrine away. In both the above cases parallelism has been assumed when it does not really exist, and the premises being incorrect it is not strange that the conclusion should be false.

#### 6. HOW TO ASCERTAIN THE FIGURATIVE MEANING OF WORDS.

1. General usage in regard to figurative expressions, is the general rule, according to which they are to be interpreted. This usage is remarkably uniform, both in sacred and profane writers, in regard to a large portion of figurative language.

In the sacred Scriptures light is universally an emblem of prosperity and happiness, and sometimes of knowledge and virtue. Darkness represents misery, ignorance, and sin. Fire has two figurative meanings. It is a common emblem of God's consuming wrath, and also of the Holy Spirit's purifying influences. These meanings, however, are always kept distinct in the sacred volume. The "refiner's fire," through which the pious are represented as passing, and the "baptism of

the Holy Ghost and of fire," are as distinct and different from "the lake of fire and brimstone, the place where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched," as heaven is from hell, or as happiness is from misery.

The meaning of the Scripture figurative language is as determinate and precise, as that of any other part of the sacred volume; and is rendered so, by the uniformity of the sacred writers in using particular figurative expressions to denote and illustrate particular ideas and those only. This uniformity in the use of figurative language is founded in the nature of things, and is common to all languages and all writers.

2. Where figurative expressions are of double or doubtful meaning, they must be interpreted according to the nature of the subject treated of. Where the general usage of the sacred writers has given different meanings to particular figurative expressions, or where the figure is in its nature indefinite in its meaning, the subject must necessarily decide which of the possible meanings is the one intended. Where figurative expressions have different established meanings, they ought to be carefully borne in mind. It is a very great fault, as well as folly, to urge a particular meaning on a metaphor in all places, because it sometimes has that meaning; or because considered without any relation to the subject in hand, it may have it; and yet cases of this error being fallen into, are by no means rare.

3. The context may be consulted with advantage for the purpose of determining the meaning of figurative language, just as it is, in regard to the literal meaning of words. In like manner does a comparison

of parallel passages throw light on many figurative expressions, which without this illustration would appear dark and doubtful.

4. In the explanation of figurative language, substitute literal expressions for figurative, expressing what is supposed to be the true sense of the passage. Wherever a figurative expression is rightly understood, it is easy to express the sense of it in plain language; where we find ourselves unable to reduce figurative to plain language, we may justly conclude that we do not understand it. The endeavor to substitute plain language, is useful in leading us to investigate with more precision and accuracy than we should be likely otherwise to do, the expressions we endeavor thus to change and simplify. Examples of figurative language changed into plain. "I am the true vine; ye are the branches." That is; I am like the true vine, and ye are like branches in relation to me.

"This is their condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil." Here are several figures blended together. Light is a metaphor used to denote truth or knowledge, which is personified and represented as coming into the world like a person. Darkness is also a metaphor, and signifies ignorance or error. The literal expressions being substituted for the figurative, the passage would read thus: This is their condemnation that truth thus has come into the world, and men loved error rather than truth, because their deeds were evil. There is still an elipsis to be supplied in order to make the passage literal, as the

word condemnation is used by metonymy for the cause of condemnation. With the alteration it would read; This is the cause of their condemnation, &c.

If on making a substitution of plain for figurative language, the expression does not harmonize with the context, and with the nature of the subject, it may be inferred that the substitution is incorrect. One of the advantages of substituting plain for figurative language, is to facilitate the application of the before mentioned rules of interpretation.

#### 7. HOW TO ASCERTAIN THE MEANING OF ALLEGORIES.

1. First, inquire into the design of the allegory, the purpose for which it was introduced. This will generally be explained in the context, and when no particular declaration of it is made, may be inferred from the circumstances and connection in which it is introduced. To disregard the evident or declared design with which an allegory is introduced, is as great an error in interpretation, as it is to disregard entirely the proposition which an argument is intended to prove in the consideration of that argument. An allegory is generally, only a part of the discourse in which it occurs, and is to be investigated in its connection with the other parts of that discourse, and not independently of them. Having ascertained the design of an allegory as far as it can be determined from the context; next proceed to examine the allegory itself.

2. Let the different parts of an allegory be explained in accordance to the main design. Most allegories

are introduced for the purpose of illustrating some particular point, and are to be considered as constituting one whole illustration, not necessarily a collection of illustrations. Thus the parable of the prodigal son was introduced by our Saviour into one of his discourses, to illustrate the benignity and kindness with which God receives the repenting sinner. The parable of the good Samaritan was introduced to illustrate and enforce the duty of universal beneficence. The different parts of these parables therefore, are to be interpreted in subserviency to their main design.

3. As no two objects resemble each other in every particular, so we are not to expect the subject of an allegory to bear a perfect resemblance to the subject intended to be illustrated by it in every particular that may be mentioned respecting it. The subject of an allegory, is always supposed to have some resemblance to the subject which it is intended to illustrate. This resemblance, like that in every other case, consists in some properties or circumstances, being the same in both.

It is a very common fault in the interpretation of allegories, to seek for too many points of resemblance, and to press the analogy on which the allegory is founded too far.

4. The application of allegories to purposes of instruction and argument, has been practised extensively, both in sacred and profane writings. Many of the inimitable discourses of our Saviour, were made up mostly of allegorical illustrations. The allegories of the Bible are of unparalleled beauty and excellence, so that the frequency with which they are introduced

in the sacred volume, contributes not a little to enhance its value, both as a literary production, and as a manual of instruction.

Allegorical discourses are peculiarly adapted to encounter prejudice and opposition, and they have very frequently been made use of for this purpose in the sacred Scriptures and in other writings.

5. The foregoing rules for the interpretation of allegories may be illustrated by the following example. Luke 18: 2—8.

“There was in a city, a judge which feared not God, neither regarded man. And there was a widow in that city, and she came unto him, saying, avenge me of my adversary. And he would not for a while, but afterward he said within himself, though I fear not God, nor regard man, yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect that cry day and night to him, though he bear long with him? I tell you he will avenge them speedily.”

1. As to the design of this parable, it is explicitly declared in the context; “That men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”

2. The poor widow asking redress of a judge, represents the case of a sinner asking favors of God. Both are alike helpless and dependent. The success of the widow’s importunity is an encouragement to sinners to be importunate with God.

The fact that the judge was unjust, renders the case a peculiarly strong and encouraging one; if an

unjust judge would yield to the importunity of a feeble, helpless widow, whom he cared nothing about, how much more would a just God, who cherishes a tender concern for his children, listen to their importunate cries and grant their reasonable requests!

The rules that have already been given for determining the meaning of words must of course settle most questions respecting the doctrines of the Bible. The doctrines of the Christian religion are revealed to us by the use of terms, which need only to be explained correctly, in order that the doctrines should be correctly apprehended. But to obtain still farther aid, we may apply where the case admits of it the following rules.

#### S. DOCTRINAL INTERPRETATION,—HISTORICAL.

1. When a doctrine or fact is clearly stated in the sacred Scriptures and indubitably taught, other passages of ambiguous or doubtful meaning, relating to the same subject are always to be explained in accordance with that doctrine or fact. The propriety and necessity of this rule arise from the fact, that we are never particular to avoid ambiguous expressions, and those considered by themselves of doubtful meaning, in relation to a subject that has been fully explained, and may be presumed to be understood. What is known in relation to such a subject is supposed to afford means of ascertaining with certainty and precision which of the meanings is to be taken in cases of ambiguity, and what is the true meaning in cases of obscurity. For example, the doctrine of the necessity of faith in Christ during the present life, in order to the

attainment of salvation, is clearly stated and definitely and indubitably taught in the New Testament. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; He that believeth not shall be damned." "There remaineth a rest to the people of God. Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of *unbelief*;" that is, after the example of the rebellious Jews, whose unbelief was the cause of their being cut off in the wilderness and not being permitted to enter the land of Canaan. So now through unbelief men become liable to be cut off in their sins and lose the enjoyment of heaven. Again we are taught, that "Christ died for all men, especially for them that believe;" that he "tasted death for every man," &c. These passages taken by themselves are ambiguous, or rather indefinite, and may be understood as teaching that Christ died absolutely to save all men without regard to character or conduct; or that he died to make it possible for all men to be saved, if they would accept salvation, on such reasonable conditions as he might see fit to propose. The doctrine of the necessity of faith to the attainment of salvation, which is clearly of scriptural authority, shows the latter to be the true meaning and the former to be entirely inadmissible. This rule is to be used cautiously, and yet it is one of very general application. The doctrine or fact which is made a rule for the interpretation of ambiguous and obscure passages and such as are indefinite, ought to be investigated with great accuracy and care; otherwise we shall be liable to great mistakes in making our own unfounded conjectures instead of God's undoubted truth, both an article of faith and a



rule of interpretation. A single mistake in making an erroneous doctrine a rule of interpretation, may lead to the most pernicious perversion of a multitude of Scripture texts.

2. Authentic history furnishes another source of information in relation to the interpretation of the sacred writings, which is in some cases at least of very essential service. Many subjects which are imperfectly explained in the sacred volume were more fully expounded in the oral instructions of the apostles and other inspired teachers; and some forms of expression which are ambiguous and obscure now, were perfectly plain, when the sacred writings were first committed to the church. In many cases therefore, it is a matter of considerable importance to ascertain what were the usages of the apostles, and of the churches in apostolic times; and how particular passages were understood by the primitive followers of Christ.

So far as any doctrine can be proved by historical evidence, to be of apostolical origin; that historical truth may be relied on as a safe rule of interpretation. For example: We learn from authentic history that the first day of the week was observed by the primitive Christians as a sabbath;—that the churches planted in different countries, and by different apostles concurred in this observance. As it is utterly improbable that they should have concurred in such an observance, unless it had been authorized by apostolic authority, we refer the institution of the Christian sabbath to the apostles, on the ground of the historical evidence in its favor. The observance of the first

day of the week must have been an apostolical usage, or it could not have been universal in the primitive church. This knowledge of the usage of the apostles, throws additional light on some passages in the New Testament which to many at least would be otherwise obscure. Finding the notices of the first day of the week interspersed through the New Testament, to be in perfect accordance with this historical fact, and such as cannot well be reconciled with any other hypothesis, we conclude with as much certainty in favor of the divine origin and authority of the Christian sabbath, as we do in favor of any other part of the Christian system.

#### 9. ENTIRE DISCOURSES AND PARAGRAPHS.

The different parts of an entire discourse or paragraph, ought to be studied in their proper connections and dependences.

The limb of a discourse like that of the human frame when amputated from the body to which it belongs, may become an incumbrance in the pursuit of knowledge, rather than a means of hastening and facilitating our progress.

In the study of the sacred Scriptures consider first the nature of the composition, whether it consists of prose or poetry; whether it is historical or doctrinal; &c. It would be absurd to interpret prose and poetry, historical and doctrinal composition by the same rules without any regard to the peculiar nature of the composition. Poetry is to be interpreted as poetry, prose as prose, preceptive writing is to be interpreted as being

preceptive, and history as history. The same general rules of interpretation apply to sacred history as to profane, and to sacred poetry as to profane, &c.

Having determined what kind of composition any particular portion of the sacred Scriptures is, you are investigating; next determine the natural divisions. Every discourse, whether historical or doctrinal, every poem and every prophecy, has a beginning, middle, and end. These ought to be distinctly noted. The beginning of a discourse ought to be connected with the middle and end; and the middle and end ought to be connected with the beginning. The force and beauty of many passages is entirely lost to multitudes from a neglect of this direction. It is not to be taken for granted, that the beginning of a chapter is in all cases the beginning of a discourse, or even of a paragraph. This is in many instances far from being the case. The Bible ought to be studied without reference to the division into chapters. The natural divisions are to be determined just as we would determine them, if there were no artificial divisions at all. Divisions of chapters frequently occur, where there is no natural division, and natural divisions still more frequently occur where there is no division into chapters in the common Bible.

The present division of the Bible into chapters was made by cardinal Hugo, a Dominican, in the year of our Lord 1240. The further and more minute division of the Bible into verses, was introduced in 1445, by a distinguished Jewish Rabbi, Mordecai Nathan. The object of these divisions being introduced, was to lay the foundation for a concordance, and to facilitate

references to different parts of the Bible. That object they have subserved admirably well; but at the same time, they have been highly injurious by disjoining parts of discourses which are intimately connected, and separating passages into different chapters which cannot be correctly understood without being studied in connection with each other.

#### 10. THE INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE CONSIDERED AS A TRANSLATION.

The rules that have been given for interpreting the sacred Scriptures, apply equally to any language. They apply to the original Hebrew and Greek, and to every translation. But the best translations are imperfect. And the scholar that does not understand the original languages, needs to be informed how he may ascertain the correctness of the translations he uses, in any particular passage. For if the translation of any particular passage is incorrect, the meaning educed from it by the best rules of interpretation, must be wrong. The difficulties in which this subject is involved, have, no doubt, discouraged some from even endeavoring to settle their belief in regard to important doctrines of the Bible. They have furnished a plausible excuse for skepticism and error to such as were quite willing to remain in the dark on religious subjects.

But honest inquirers need not despair. Truth may be ascertained in regard to this subject, as far as is necessary for the important purposes of faith and practice.

*Rules by which those unacquainted with the original languages of the Scriptures, may decide on the correctness of the translation.*

1. The general agreement of commentators in regard to the correctness or incorrectness of any particular passage, may be safely relied on as indicating the truth. Because such an agreement cannot exist, except where the case is one of undoubted certainty. If several different commentators, skilled in the original languages, decide that a passage is correctly translated, we have the strongest reason to confide in their decision, especially if there is no counter testimony. This rule lays a foundation for confidence in regard to the great body of the sacred Scriptures. Commentators of every respectable denomination of Christians, and many persons who have joined no particular sect, have generally acquiesced in the decision, that our common English Bible is correct; and that, considered as a whole, it is a faithful representation of the sense of the original. This agreement is general and decisive; cases of dissent from it are partial and particular.

2. In all cases where the correctness of the English translation is called in question, we are to decide according to evidence, and not arbitrarily, as is too often done. Evidence is sometimes found in the context, either for or against the common translation. Especially when a new translation is recommended, ought its agreement or disagreement with the context to be carefully observed. A translation which does not agree with the context must be wrong. This disagreement is decisive evidence against it.

3. A translation which does not make sense must of course be wrong. To maintain the contrary, is a high impeachment of the sacred volume. All that scripture which has been given by inspiration of God, makes a good and consistent sense in the original, and must, in all cases when correctly translated, be of the same character.

4. When a particular translation makes a good and consistent sense, and does not disagree with the context, and is, at the same time, a matter of dispute among biblical scholars and commentators;—first take the opinions of the critics and commentators in question, and consider on which side there appears to be the most learning, candor, integrity, and piety. That side on which there is a preponderance of these qualifications, is probably right. Secondly; examine the reasons given in favor of the translation in question, or against it. If these reasons are substantial, we may safely yield our assent; otherwise not.

A commentator who dissents from the common translation of any particular passage, and proposes a different one, is bound to give substantial reasons for that dissent, and for the translation he recommends. These reasons may, in most cases, be apprehended with perfect clearness by such as are unacquainted with the original languages, and will afford very important aid in resolving difficulties of this kind.

Whoever attends to these rules will seldom be involved in very great perplexity as to any thing effecting materially the fundamental articles of the Christian faith. In relation to those numerous passages of Scripture, in which, these articles are taught

either directly or by implication, there is a general and happy agreement among the great body of sound biblical scholars, and especially among that portion of them that are eminent for piety as well as learning.

5. If any man finds himself involved in doubt as to the translation of any particular passage or passages of Scripture, and is unable to obtain the works of biblical commentators and expositors as directed above; let him go to a well instructed clergyman of any respectable branch of the Christian church, and ask instruction in the case, and he will seldom fail of obtaining it.

Knowledge is to be had, if men will take the trouble to apply for it; and surely none can desire it on easier terms.

I do not propose that any man's *ipse dixit* should be taken as a rule of faith or of interpretation. To pursue such a course would be to perpetuate erroneous interpretations indefinitely. But I do recommend that those who have not the means of extensive and accurate information on this subject, should allow those who have, to direct their minds to principles and facts which may lead them to truth, and protect them from error in all matters of vital importance. Error is the child of ignorance, and ignorance in most cases springs from a voluntary and criminal neglect of the means of improvement and information. God has made it our duty to know the truth, and has amply furnished us with the means of gaining this knowledge. No man need be a skeptic, none need be an unbeliever, if he will consent to use honestly, and diligently, and prayerfully, those means of instruction, which God has placed within his reach, and urged upon his acceptance.

## SECTION III.

### THE RATIONALISTIC MODE OF INTERPRETATION.

1. Many persons talk a great deal of the Scriptures being according to reason; and take considerable liberties in the interpretation of them, for the purpose of making them speak such language as they think is reasonable.

The mode of interpretation adopted by such, is in some respects peculiar. *The fundamental principle of it is, that the sacred Scriptures are accordant to reason.*

This principle is not pretended to be applicable to men's productions, because men are liable to hold sentiments and make statements that are untrue and unreasonable; and therefore the fact that a particular doctrine is unreasonable, is no proof that men have not held, and inculcated it in their writings.

2. Let us investigate this rule. The sacred Scriptures must be accordant to reason? What is reason? If reason is a rule of interpretation it ought to be well understood. The *word reason* has two principal meanings. 1. It designates the foundation or cause of an opinion or conclusion—as we think thus and so, for



this and that reason. Every correct opinion is based on some sufficient reason, which is the cause of our holding it.

We believe that Columbus discovered America ; and the reason for this belief, or the foundation on which it rests, is the fact that the discovery of it, is universally attributed to him ; especially by those acquainted with the history of the times in which he lived.

To believe without reasons is denominated unreasonable ; and is well entitled to this denomination.

Those sentiments, therefore, are reasonable for which reasons of sufficient weight can be assigned ; in this connection, reasons are nearly the same as evidences. 2. The word reason also designates that power of the mind, by which we distinguish truth from error, and gain knowledge by comparison and inference. We employ this faculty in all our investigations, whether of the Bible and Bible-truth, or of any other subject. No matter what system of interpretation we adopt, reason is the faculty, in the exercise of which we apply the rules of that system to the interpretation of language.

The true sense of the sacred Scriptures, is that sense, which, in the right and intelligent use of reason is educed from them. This, however, is by no means making reason a rule of interpretation ; it is only making it an instrument, by which the acknowledged rules of the art are applied.

3. From a consideration of the definitions of reason here given, which will be found to be correct, and in conformity with the best authorities, it appears

highly improper to make reason a rule of interpretation. The fact, that any thing is asserted in the Bible, without any collateral evidence, is itself a reason for our belief, and one that amply justifies the highest confidence man can repose in any assertion.

This subject may be farther and more fully illustrated by the following propositions.

1. Knowledge is a safe rule of interpretation, and one of universal application. Any interpretation of Scripture which gives a meaning contradictory to our absolute knowledge must be wrong. Though in other respects, the meaning in question might appear to be the true one, yet the fact that it contradicts our certain knowledge proves it to be false. The reason of this rule is obvious. Men are never expected to speak and write with as much precision upon subjects well understood, as upon those which are obscure. In reference to such subjects we use words in figurative and uncommon senses, as best suits our convenience, and expect them to be interpreted as the nature of the subject may require,—neither are we disappointed in our expectations.

In reference to subjects which are difficult, or such as are not generally understood, we find it necessary to use words with more precision and accuracy, in order to make our communications intelligible. This distinction, in regard to the loose and accurate use of words, obtains in all correct writers, sacred and profane, and ought to be more generally known and regarded than it is. Christ is called a son of David, meaning as every one knows, a descendant of that prince; a vine, that is, metaphorically like a vine; a

corner stone, like a corner stone in relation to the church;—a rock of offence, that is, a cause of offence to the unbelieving and disobedient; all which are perfectly intelligible, because the subject to which they relate is too well understood, to allow of mistake in regard to their meaning.

2. As every part of the sacred Scriptures is equally true, those passages which contain apparent contradictions must be so explained, as to harmonize with each other. Apparent contradictions are often far from being real ones. The most rash and superficial students of the inspired volume, are those who find the most difficulties of this kind. Patient investigation of the meaning of the words, of the context and subject treated of, will generally demonstrate the apparent contradictions of the Bible to be perfectly harmonious, and in perfect agreement with each other.

3. Preconceived opinion which does not amount to knowledge, cannot with propriety be made a rule of interpretation. The natural world presents many objects and the course of divine providence unfolds many events which we did not expect to find, and which when observed awaken our wonder and surprise. It is but reasonable therefore to expect in the economy of grace, and in the moral and religious system of the universe, many things exceedingly strange to us, and entirely different from what we should have thought best to have. The Bible explains the moral and religious system of the world. The design of it is to teach what we could not learn from any other of the sources of knowledge in relation to the subject in question.

The fact therefore, that some of the representations of the Bible, are at variance with our preconceived opinions, and different from what we should think best, is no objection at all to the correctness and truth of them, but furnishes a substantial argument in favor of the fidelity and correctness of the inspired writers. This rule is directly opposed to the fundamental one of the rationalistic mode of interpretation. Those who talk so much of the sacred Scriptures being accordant to reason, do not mean simply that they must be accordant to certain knowledge and known truths. For respecting that, there is no dispute and cannot be. But they mean, that the sacred Scriptures must be accordant to those opinions, which do not come under the denomination of known truths, but which are readily acquiesced in as being probable, without any *decisive* evidence in their favor. But happily for the cause of truth and piety, though unfortunately for the honor of this system of interpretation, in all cases where our knowledge of the subject under consideration, is not sufficiently accurate and extensive to be a safe guide to interpretation, words are used in their most common and usual significations. This fact supersedes the necessity of any other rule of interpretation than the usual ones, for ascertaining the meaning of words. When men are treating of subjects not well or generally understood, they never use words in uncommon significations without giving the clearest intimation of the fact, and showing precisely what those significations are, unless they mean to bewilder and deceive their readers.

In relation to such subjects, they are compelled to use words with precision, and in their most usual meanings, in order to make their communications intelligible. In exact accordance to this principle as well as the other principles of language, the divinely inspired writings were composed. To assert the contrary amounts to nothing less than an impeachment of the wisdom and goodness of God and is unsupported by the least substantial evidence. Besides, so far as reference is had to the opinions of men in the interpretation of language, that reference must of course be to the opinions of contemporaries and countrymen, and not to those of later times and of other lands. Hence the necessity of every interpreter of the Bible acquainting himself as far as possible with the history of opinions in the times when the different parts of the sacred Scriptures were written.

The opinions of the Jews and heathen in relation to the state of the wicked after death, will serve as an illustration of this subject. In the times of our Saviour and the apostles, two of the principal sects of the Jews, all who believed in a future state, believed in the doctrine of the punishment of the wicked after death. The same doctrine was held by the most popular of the heathen philosophers and was inculcated on the people generally. We are therefore to consider the instructions of the New Testament as addressed to persons holding this sentiment, and to interpret them accordingly.

If believers in the doctrine of the future punishment of the wicked, would not naturally interpret the instructions of the New Testament as authorizing

a belief in that sentiment and inculcating it, we are not to understand them as doing so. But if they would naturally, and necessarily put this construction on the communications relating to this subject in the New Testament, we must acknowledge it to be correct. For if Christ or the apostles had wished to discountenance the prevailing sentiment of the times in relation to the subject in question, they would doubtless have done it, in terms too unequivocal to be mistaken by any candid hearer or reader. And the fact that they have not discountenanced it, but have interspersed their instructions with expressions highly favorable to the sentiment in question, and have in many instances positively asserted that sentiment, if language may be allowed to have the same force in their mouths that it has in the mouths of others, is conclusive evidence of the strongest kind in favor of the doctrine.

From the foregoing remarks the legitimate conclusion is, that the Rationalistic mode of interpretation is entirely incorrect, being based upon principles that are entirely false. Consequently the application of it to explain the Holy Scriptures, is alike impious and delusive. It is impious, inasmuch as it implies the setting up of the fabric of human opinions against God's eternal truth, and in the place of it. It is delusive, inasmuch as it erects an impregnable wall of defence around the erroneous opinions and baseless conjectures of men, for the purpose of maintaining them in possession of the stolen honors of truth.

## SECTION IV.

### THE ALLEGORICAL MODE OF INTERPRETATION, OR THEORY OF DOUBLE SENSES.

1. The allegorical mode of interpretation is of very great antiquity. It was in use among the Jews before the Christian era. Philo was an allegorist; so were Pantaenus and Clemens Alexandrinus of the second century and in the Christian church. Origin in the third century took greater liberties with this mode of interpretation, than any Christian teacher had done before him. Before his time all interpreters explained the narrations and laws contained in the Bible according to their literal meaning. Origin turned a large part of biblical history into fables, and many of the laws into allegories. In doing this he followed the track that had already been marked out in the school of Ammonius at the close of the preceding century.

Ammonius Saccas an Alexandrine philosopher of the second century, opened a school near the close of the century, and laid the foundation of that sect of philosophers called the New Platonic.

His object was to bring all religions and all sects of philosophers into harmony. He taught that philo-

sophy was first produced and nurtured among the people of the east. That it was cultivated and disseminated in Egypt by Hermes, and that it passed thence into Greece, and was explained with tolerable accuracy and correctness by Plato. It is the opinion of many, that the pretended work of Hermes and Zoroaster originated in the schools of the New Platonics.

In order to reconcile the prevailing religions with his philosophical system, Ammonius turned the whole pretended history of the pagan Gods into allegory. This system Origen applied with specifications and modifications peculiar to himself, and borrowed from various sources, to the interpretation of the sacred volume.

Preceding writers had resorted to allegories principally to discover predictions of future events, and rules for the direction of life; he resorted to them principally to establish his favorite system of heathen philosophy on a scriptural basis.

“ The Platonic idea of a two-fold world, a visible and invisible one, and the one emblematical of the other, lead him to search for a figurative description of the invisible world, in the inspired history of this. He supposed, that as man was admitted to consist of three parts, a rational mind, a sensitive soul, and a visible body, so the Scriptures have a three-fold sense, a literal, moral, and mystical or spiritual sense. The mystical or spiritual sense, he supposed, acquainted us with the nature, state, and history of the spiritual and heavenly world; which he believed to have been made after the same pattern as this.



The mystic sense he attributed to every part of the sacred Scriptures ; the literal sense was only partially diffused, according to his view, some passages having no literal meaning at all.

A similar system of allegorical interpretation has more recently been inculcated by Swedenborg. He attributes to the sacred Scriptures three senses, which he entitles the literal, spiritual, and celestial.

While both the systems here referred to, have been generally discarded by the Christian church, multitudes in all ages have turned Scripture into allegory for the purpose of rendering particular passages of them more significant than they would otherwise be, either in the prediction of future events or in the communication of moral and religious instruction.

2. The allegorical system of interpretation is built upon what is called the doctrine of correspondences ; namely, that there is such a correspondence between natural and spiritual, terrestrial and celestial objects and events, as to make the former correct and perfect types of the latter. If the doctrine of a correspondence between natural and spiritual, terrestrial and celestial objects and events, be admitted in its full extent, so that the one is an exact resemblance of the other ; then all descriptions of natural objects and events, as well as those contained in Scripture, may be considered figurative of spiritual and heavenly things, and may be applied to represent such things with the utmost propriety. The principle is very broad and extensive in its application. It applies with as much force to profane as to sacred history ; and, according to this system of philosophy, (for it deserves the appellation of a

system of philosophy, rather than one of religion, or of interpretation) all profane history would be allegorical and descriptive of spiritual and heavenly things, however ignorant the authors might be of any such meaning being attached to their language.

3. But the doctrine of correspondences is no where asserted in the Bible. The inspired writers have used figurative language just as they might be expected to do, if no such correspondence existed; and the use of these figures, with which their writings abound, is fully authorized by that principle of general analogies which is the foundation of metaphorical language among uninspired writers. Figurative language may be pressed too far. We are not to suppose that there is a perfect resemblance in every particular wherever there is a general one in some particulars. Things resemble each other which have some things in common. The more things they have in common the greater is their resemblance.

Earth resembles heaven just as far as it has things in common with it. Body resembles mind just as far as it has properties in common with it. God resembles the sun, to which he is several times compared, just as far as he has properties and relations in common with it, and no farther. So light resembles knowledge as far as it has relations and properties in common with it. Light and vision are to the eye what knowledge is to the soul; that is, their relations are analogous. But in this view of the subject, perfect resemblance of earthly to heavenly objects is not assumed; neither is it necessary to assume it, in order to justify the analogical and figurative language of the sacred Scriptures.

4. *Arguments generally adduced in favor of a double sense being attributed to the sacred Scriptures.*

1. Unless we allow them to have other meanings than the plain and obvious one according to the common rules of interpretation, some parts of the sacred volume will become unimportant and unimportant. Answer. The knowledge contained in the Bible, interpreted by the common rules of interpretation, is of the greatest extent and highest value. It is a fountain which the most powerful and active minds have been unable to fathom, and still more so, to exhaust. Explained on these principles only, it teaches the purest morality, and the sublimest theology. It discloses the only way of life and salvation, and points out the only effectual means of regaining the favor of God.

Those parts of the Bible, or those passages, for it is only to occasional passages that the remark can be applied, which seem unimportant to us, may have been highly important and useful when they were originally written, or may be still so in some future period of the world, without any aid being derived from the theory of double senses to render them so.

2. It is also urged, that on the hypothesis of double senses, the Bible is made more spiritual than on the other hypothesis. Answer. The word spiritual has three meanings. 1. Consisting of spirit; as we say of the mind, it is a spiritual substance—a substance consisting of spirit. 2. Relating to spirit and the concerns of spirits, as we speak of spiritual enjoyments, spiritual

world, &c. 3. Pious, religious; as we say of a pious man, he is very spiritual, that is, he is very pious, devout.

The application of the term spiritual to the Bible, in the first sense, is absurd; for it contradicts our intuitive perception. We know by the evidence of our senses, that the different communications which compose the Bible, taken separately, and the whole taken collectively, are not spirit in the literal sense of that word. They do not consist of spirit, that is, they are not a living reasoning and thinking being.

The word spiritual, in the second and third senses mentioned above, is strictly applicable to the sacred Scriptures, understood according to the common rules of interpretation. They relate principally to spirits, and the concerns and destinies of spirits; and are of a highly devotional tendency. Nay, in these senses they are spiritual in the highest degree; that is to say, they are in the highest degree devotional, and relate entirely to spiritual concerns.

3. It is further urged that the theory of double senses is more in accordance with the divine character and operations than that of single senses.

Why enigmatical or allegorical discourses are more in accordance to the divine operations generally, than plain ones, it is difficult for a plain man to conceive.

God's communications must be in accordance to his attributes. One of his attributes is truth: His communications must therefore be true. One of his attributes is justice; his communications and requirements must therefore be just. These are moral attributes, and give character to the divine communications, as they do to the other divine operations. The

same may be said of wisdom, mercy, and other moral attributes of the divine character.

But you cannot with propriety add ; God is an Allegory, and therefore his communications must be allegorical—or that God is a spirit and therefore his communications must consist of spirit. Man too is a spirit ; but his communications do not consist of spirit. The spirituality of the communications does not follow as a consequence from the spirituality of the agent that makes them. Communications are only one class of phenomena resulting from the divine operations ; and if these consist of spirit so must all such phenomena.

Besides it is according to the analogy of the divine operations and according to the attributes of the divine character, that if God should undertake to hold intercourse with men through the medium of language he would use language as men use it, and express himself intelligibly. No communication is intelligible, which is not contained in language understood by man. God has made his communications in languages which were generally understood at the time and in the countries in which they were made, and which we still have the means of learning. If he departed in any measure from the common usage, in the application of words to designate objects or to express ideas, it would become necessary in order to be understood, to show how far and in what, that usage was departed from. No such explanation is found. God nowhere intimates that the meaning he attaches to words is different from the common one, neither does he anywhere intimate, that the theory of double senses is that according to which he requires his word to be explained.

## 5. ADDITIONAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE THEORY OF DOUBLE SENSES.

1. The later inspired writers often quote from the writings of those who preceded them; but never refer to those writings as having more than one true meaning. In Acts 2: 25, we find a quotation of this kind; as also in Acts 13: 35—37. It is evident from an inspection of these passages, that the apostles considered the declaration which they quoted, as referring solely to Christ, and not to David at all. For they expressly assert that it cannot be applied to David and that it did not receive its fulfillment in him.

2. The historical parts of the Bible are as simple narratives of events as any other history, and have no marks of allegorical and hidden meanings, that other historical writings do not have. Take for example the histories of David, Solomon, Ahab, &c. They appear to be as free from allegorical and hidden meanings, as the histories of Constantine, George the 4th, Calvin, Luther, or any other individuals, narratives of whose lives are recorded.

3. The same may be said of the preceptive parts of the Bible. They exhibit no marks of hidden and allegorical senses that other preceptive writings do not exhibit. The laws of God are stated with as much precision and with as much apparent simplicity as any intelligent father would use, in giving directions to his children. The command thou shalt not kill, forbids our unlawfully taking the life of a fellow man, and of course prohibits all those angry and revengeful feelings, that lead to murder. There is no need of alle-

gorical interpretation to give such ample extent to this command. It is already sufficiently extensive in its meaning. The same may be said of every other precept.

4. The origin and early history of the allegorical mode of interpretation are against it. Authentic history instead of referring it to the schools of the prophets or to the communications of divinely inspired men, can trace it only to the mystic instructions of Jewish Rabbies, who made void the law of God by their puerile traditions, or to the schools of heathen philosophy whose very light consisted in the thickest darkness of paganism. When God spake to Moses from the burning bush, and on various other occasions, his words must have been understood according to their usual meanings. Moses could not have supposed them to mean any thing more or less, than to designate those ideas which men generally attach to them. When God spoke to the children of Israel from Mount Sinai, he must have been understood in a similar manner by them. They had only one dictionary by which to learn the meaning of words whether used in the communications of God to man, or of man to his God and to his fellow man.

5. If God had intended that his words should be interpreted in allegorical senses, and that other meanings different and distinct from the natural one, should be conveyed, we should suppose of course, that he would have intimated that fact to the prophets and have authorized them to have revealed it to the church at large ; but we have no historical evidence, that this was ever done, neither have any general or particular

rules been given by inspiration according to which, the investigation of hidden senses is to be prosecuted.

6. Allegorical interpretation is injurious to the interests of religion, in leading persons to neglect and undervalue the natural sense of the sacred Scriptures. In these writings interpreted according to the common rules and principles of language, are treasured up the great doctrines and duties of the Christian religion; doctrines and duties by which, sinners are converted to God, and saints prepared for heaven. If the study of these doctrines and the practice of these duties are not constantly urged, religion can hardly fail to decline. A system of interpretation therefore, which leads men to overlook and undervalue them, must be of highly pernicious tendency and this is certainly in many instances the fact, with those who adopt the allegorical system of interpretation. They puzzle themselves with prying into supposed allegories, when they ought to be studying faith, repentance and prayer.

7. Again, in multitudes of cases, the pretended internal senses are the plain and obvious meanings of the passages to which they are attributed, or nothing more than obvious inferences from those meanings, so that there is no need of other rules of interpretation than the common ones to elicit them.

We ought carefully to distinguish between the proper meaning of a passage, and the inferences which may be even correctly drawn from it. For example; the command thou shalt not kill, means thou shalt not unlawfully take human life. Inferences however, which may be drawn from it are exceedingly numer-



ous and various. If we are prohibited from inflicting death on the body, surely it must be wrong for us voluntarily to be the cause of the eternal death of the soul. But to prohibit inflicting spiritual injury, so to speak, was no part of the design of God, in the command under consideration. But though it was no part of his design to make that prohibition in this passage, yet he has made and repeated it in many others, and the principle on which it is founded, is the same as that which serves as the foundation of the prohibition referred to in the command, "Thou shalt not kill," that is, thou shalt not inflict temporal death. The principle of this and of every other prohibition and of every other command relating to social duties, is "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." And in applying it we are to remember, that love is kind, and that it worketh no ill to our neighbor.

S. Finally, according to the common rules of interpretation the Bible inculcates every moral virtue, and interdicts every species of sin, at the same time that it presents the strongest motives to obedience and holds out the strongest dissuasives from disobedience. The theory of double senses therefore, cannot increase the perfection of the Bible as a rule of life, it being already perfect and complete.

From all which, the conclusion is obvious and irresistible, that the theory of double senses, or in other words, the system of mystical and allegorical interpretation is wrong and injurious.

## SECTION V.

### INTERPRETATION OF THE PROPHECIES.

The prophetic writings of the sacred Scriptures are almost entirely useless to a large portion of professed Christians, from the imperfect understanding they have of them. Prophecy corresponds to history. It is a narrative or description of events, written before the events take place. Both prophecy and history are expected to give a correct and true delineation of the events to which they refer, and of no others. In many cases the language of prophecy is as full and explicit as it is possible for that of history to be. In many cases prophecies are obscure, especially, where they have not been fulfilled;—and their obscurity arises principally from the difficulty of determining their chronology;—and also of distinguishing plain from figurative language.

The difficulty of determining the chronology of events referred to in the prophetic writings, occasions the same obscurity in the prophecies, which a similar indefiniteness of chronological notices, would occasion in history, if it were admitted there.

The difficulty of distinguishing plain from figurative language, is greater in prophetic than in historical writings, on account of our not being able to compare the description, with the event, as we uniformly do, when the event has taken place. This difficulty vanishes when the prediction is fulfilled and is known to be so.

1. The first step to be taken in the interpretation of a prophecy, is to determine if possible, the time when it was delivered, and the circumstances of the prophet and people at that time. In some cases, the time is expressly declared, as Isa. 6: 1. "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw," &c. So also 7: 1 of the same book, which was at least seventeen years later than that of the preceding chapter, being in the time of Ahaz; and the reign of Jotham, which continued sixteen years, having intervened.

Sometimes when the date of a prophecy is not expressly given, it may be inferred from some expression or expressions descriptive of the existing state of things. This is the case with the prophecy contained in the first chapter of Isaiah. In the sixth and seventh verses of this chapter, the land of Judah is described as being desolated by enemies, and the condition of the people as being one of extreme depression. By turning to the books of Kings and Chronicles, we find, that the description above referred to, cannot have indicated the state of things, in the prosperous reign of Uzziah, or in that of Jotham. But that it accords well with the actual state of the country in the reign of Ahaz. Hence we infer, that the prophecy contained in this chapter was delivered in the reign of that idola-

trous and unfortunate monarch, and seventeen years later than the prophecy contained in the sixth chapter of the same book.

In determining the times of the delivery of different prophecies or prophetic discourses ; it is to be borne in mind, that the different prophetic books of the Old Testament, are not arranged in their proper chronological order.

Jonah prophesied much earlier than Isaiah, notwithstanding his book is placed after that of Isaiah, in the sacred volume.

The principle on which the present arrangement was made, was to place the prophetic books in the order of their comparative lengths, without any regard to the times of their composition and delivery. A similar arrangement was adopted in regard to the epistles of the New Testament. The longer epistles are placed before the shorter in the order of their comparative lengths, with the exception that the epistle to the Hebrews, and the Revelation of St. John, for particular reasons, stand out of their proper order.

In addition to the fact that the arrangement of the prophetic books is not a chronological one ; it is worthy of particular remark, that the different parts of the same book do not always stand in their proper chronological order. An instance of this has already been given from Isaiah, others might easily be adduced from the longer books of the prophets. This irregularity arose probably from the different prophetic discourses having been published separately ; and when they came to be collected after the deaths of those prophets, they were put together without any

very thorough investigation of the order in which they were written and published.

2. Having ascertained as nearly as we can, the time when a prophetic discourse or poem was delivered, we are prepared to proceed intelligently to the investigation of that discourse. Here we are to consider that every discourse has a beginning, middle, and end; and that these are in many cases very different, from what, the division into chapters would indicate. We are not to take it for granted that a discourse ends with a chapter. Discourses are sometimes continued through several chapters successively, and every part ought to be studied in connection with every other part.

3. The principal subject treated of in every prophetic discourse, ought to be carefully ascertained and descriptive terms interpreted so as to correspond with the subject. If there is an incongruity between any of those terms and the subject to which they relate when understood literally, they ought to be interpreted figuratively, as in historical writings, and indeed in all other kinds of composition. Some figurative modes of expression acquire a fixed and certain meaning from established usage; as using the term days to designate years, &c. The abundant use made of figures of speech in the prophetic writings, renders the interpretation of them exceedingly difficult. This peculiarity arises in part perhaps, from those writings having been composed in poetry, which is characteristically figurative.

4. Events which are represented as continuous, ought to be carefully distinguished. Events are often

grouped together in prophecy as well as in other kinds of writing, in consequence of having some general relation to each other, which, in point of time, are widely separated. We are not to infer, because events are described or referred to in immediate succession, that their occurrence will be in immediate succession too. The fact is sometimes quite the reverse of this. Take, for example, the Redeemer's kingdom. The feeble beginnings of it are mentioned in connection with its glorious establishment and universal prevalence, and yet they are separated by centuries of time.

Inattention to this point has occasioned floods of error in the interpretation of prophetic language both in ancient and modern times.

The 24th chapter of Matthew has been enveloped in needless obscurity by a neglect of this rule. The subjects treated of in that chapter, are mentioned in the 2d and 3d verses—the destruction of Jerusalem, the future coming, or second advent of Christ, and the end of the world ; events perfectly distinct, though treated of continuously.

To the 29th verse, the discourse of our Saviour relates evidently to the destruction of Jerusalem. From the 29th to the 31st inclusive, it treats of the second advent of Christ, and of preceding and attending events. The 33d, 34th, and 35th verses, refer evidently to the former, under the appellation *these things*. The 36th, and the following, refer to the latter, under the appellation *that day*, an appellation applied to the second advent of Christ, in other parts of the sacred volume. See 2 Tim. 4: 7, 8,

“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day”; that is, the day of the second advent and judgment.

5. Those representations of the future are to be considered figurative, in which there is a distinct reference to earlier occurrences in Jewish or general history. The future is often described in prophecy by figurative descriptions borrowed from events that are past. An example of this may be found in Isa. 11: 15, 16, where it is said, that in effecting a new deliverance for his people, “the Lord will utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea, and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dryshod, and there shall be a highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left from Assyria, like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.” This destroying of the Red sea, and making a passage across the seven streams of the Nile, contain an evident allusion to events which characterized the Exodus from Egypt, and forcibly and clearly teach that God was to effect a wonderful deliverance for his covenant people, but not that he was literally to dry up the sea, or open a passage through the river. So also in Isa. 4: 5. “And the Lord will create upon every dwelling place of Mount Zion and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flame of fire by night, for upon all the glory shall be a defence.” This passage contains an allusion to the cloudy and fiery pillar which God exhibited to the Israelites at the time of the Exodus from Egypt, and

which was rendered both the guide and protection of that people during their perilous journey. The meaning of it is, that at the time referred to, God will grant special protection to his children, as much as if every assembly for his worship, and every dwelling of his worshippers were surrounded with the cloud of the divine presence in the day time, and with the fire by night.

Zechariah 10: 11, and Hosea 2: 14, 15, afford examples of a similar nature.

6. Those representations of the future are to be considered figurative, in which there is a distinct reference to the Levitical rites and ceremonies. This rule is similar to the preceding, and is founded on the same principle, a principle which prompts us intuitively to represent and describe things unknown by imagery drawn from such as are known. The modes of Christian worship were to the pious in the days of the Old Testament prophets, things unknown, though the principles of it are the same as they ever have been. It is not strange, therefore, that the prophets should array the religion of future times in the pious garb with which the saints of that age were familiar.

An example of this may be found in Jer. 33: 17, 18, "For thus saith the Lord, David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel; neither shall the priests, the Levites, want a man before me to offer burnt offerings, and to kindle meat offerings, and to do sacrifice continually."

This passage relates evidently to the times of the Messiah. To make it assert the perpetuity of the Levitical rites and ceremonies, would be an utter per-



version of its true meaning, inasmuch, as according to that construction, the assertion it contains is entirely false in fact, and opposed to the doctrine of a different and new dispensation to commence under the auspices of the Messiah, which the prophets had clearly predicted.

Instead, therefore, of considering it as asserting the perpetuity of the Levitical rites, we ought to view it as declaring the continued and universal prevalence of the true worship of God, and that in language, and by the aid of imagery, best adapted to the imperfect knowledge of those times.

7. Those representations of the future in which there is a distinct reference to persons who had lived previous to the time of the prophecy, are to be considered as figurative.

Of this kind, is that prediction contained in Mal. 4: 5. "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, and he shall turn the heart," &c.

Not that Elijah should come in person, but that one should come of his fervent, ardent and faithful spirit, to perform the office referred to.

8. Figurative and literal expressions are often blended in prophecy, so as to require much care and attention in discriminating between them. In such cases, the literal, when ascertained, must be allowed to explain and modify the figurative; and one part of a prophecy must be interpreted in consistency with other parts of the same. Because some part of a prophetic description is figurative, we are not to infer that the whole is, neither because some part of it is to be under-

stood literally, are we to infer that the whole is to be so understood, any more than we should make the same inference in regard to history or any other kind of poetry than the prophetic.

9. The prophecies are to be considered as constituting one connected chain of events and are to be interpreted so as to harmonize with each other. All such interpretations of them as set them at variance with one another, are manifestly wrong, and derogatory to the sacred Scriptures. Every part of the prophetic writings has some relation to other parts of the same ; just as every part of a well written history, has some relation to other parts of the same. In order to understand one part of the prophecies well, we must study the whole. For example, in order to understand well one part of Isaiah, we must study the whole of that distinguished prophet ; and in order to understand well that prophet, we must study the rest of the prophets, both Old Testament and New ; so intimately are the prophetic writings connected, and so happily and forcibly do they illustrate each other.

10. No prophecy is to be interpreted as having more than one true meaning, however comprehensive it may be, and to whatever length of time it may relate. The obscurity of this part of the sacred Scriptures and the sudden transitions they contain, from one subject and from one event to another, have led biblical scholars to apply to them the theory of allegorical senses, more frequently and confidently than to other parts of the sacred Scriptures. It has been very convenient to suppose that many prophecies have received

one fulfillment in events that transpired at one time, and that they waited till a more remote period for another full accomplishment. This system of interpretation has the recommendation of convenience in helping us to get comfortably around difficulties, which on the other plan, we must look full in the face and boldly encounter.

But it is unsatisfactory and unphilosophical. Besides, the principle is just as inappropriate to prophecy as it is to history. The idea of describing two events at one dash, whether past or to come, appears absurd. It is what man never attempted to do in works of moral, religious or scientific instruction. God has never commanded us to compass the impossibility of making out primary and secondary senses to the simple and ample disclosures of his word. No sober scholar thinks of giving a double sense to history; why then obtrude it upon prophecy? Why consider God in this part, and in this part only of his word, as departing from the universal rules of human composition and language. But if we drive the theory of double senses from one part of the sacred volume, we may by the same weapons and by the same system of warfare drive it from every part of that blessed book, around which it has thrown such a mist of absurdity.

11. The prophetic writings ought to be studied in connection with the historical parts of Scripture. In the first place, we ought to make ourselves familiarly acquainted with the state of things, when the prophetic discourse we are studying, was delivered. This will elucidate many passages which to one des-

titude of that knowledge would be necessarily obscure.

In the second place, we ought to make ourselves familiar with the history of events to which the prophecy we are investigating relates. Prediction derives illustration from the history of the event to which it relates, just as a description in geography, is rendered more clear by a map representing to the eye the places described. The history of events which were the fulfillment of prophecy is contained partly in the sacred volume, and is to be sought for partly in the records of profane history. A large number of the prophecies have the history of their fulfillment in the later portions of the sacred Scriptures. This is the case, with many of the predictions which relate to the fortunes of the Jewish nation—the Messiah, and the first establishment of his kingdom in the Christian dispensation, &c; also several predictions relating to the fortunes of ancient heathen nations.

12. Those interpretations of prophecy in which the events supposed to be pointed out, do not correspond to the prediction, must be false. This rule shows the fallacy and incorrectness of those interpretations of the 24th and 25th of Matthew, which refer, all the predictions contained in them, to the destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the Romans, and to contemporaneous and preceding events.

The prophetic account of the advent of Christ, given in those chapters, and of the general judgment in which all nations are to be concerned, and their destinies of weal or woe decided upon, has nothing in the history of the destruction of Jerusalem, and con-

temporaneous events, which answers to it. There was no visible advent of Christ at the destruction of Jerusalem; there was no general judgment at that time more than at other times; there was no receiving of the righteous into glory, and banishment of the wicked into hell, at that time, more than at other times. For these reasons, therefore, as well as others, we may conclude, that all the predictions contained in these chapters did not receive their fulfillment at the time referred to.

The accomplishment of prophecy may be gradual; it may extend through a series of years, and embrace like history many subordinate events, but it must have one true proper fulfillment.

A person who understands the rules of interpretation for prophetic language, and who endeavors to follow them, may, in some cases, be mistaken, but one who does not understand and observe them, will be almost sure to err in numberless instances. And it will be found equally true in this, and in every other department of sacred learning, that the hand of the diligent maketh rich in knowledge as well as wealth. Search therefore, diligently, intelligently, prayerfully, the SCRIPTURES; "for in them ye think ye have eternal life," and the gospel which they communicate, "is the power of God to salvation."

## SECTION VI.

### ON THE INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE, CONSIDERED AS CONTAINING A SYSTEM OF PURE MORALITY AND RELIGION.

1. Moral and religious truths are not like objects of sense, that force themselves upon the attention of every beholder. They cannot be understood without reflection and study. Men must think in order to apprehend them aright. The subject of morals is in its nature, a complicated, and in some of its facts and relations, a difficult subject. It is open to the studious, candid, persevering inquirer; but its truths do not effectually catch the eye and captivate the heart of the superficial, impatient and uncandid dogmatist.

In this respect the Bible is like other books which relate to difficult subjects. Works on natural philosophy, mathematics, and other branches of science, though prepared with ever so much ability, and ever so well adapted to the human mind, cannot be understood without patient persevering study.

2. As far as the subjects treated of in the Bible, come within the sphere of human observation, examine those subjects particularly; and compare them

with the descriptions of them and references to them, contained in the Bible. This rule is one of fundamental importance. When you read of man, as described in the Bible, look at him as living and acting in the world. Let the theoretical views of the Bible in relation to subjects of this kind, be illustrated by living examples of that to which they refer. The examples will illustrate and explain the theory better than it can possibly be explained in any other way.

3. In all matters of duty practice as well as theorize. Even in the sciences, the path of experiment is the most direct, and in some cases, the only way to knowledge. This is emphatically the case in regard to the most spiritual parts of the Christian system. They cannot be correctly understood and appreciated by the cold calculating theorist, while he continues such. Colors must be viewed with the natural eye in order that we may understand them correctly, and be able to distinguish one from another. Mere description can never give us adequate ideas in relation to colors, except in connection with our own experimental knowledge. So in regard to holiness. We must understand it experimentally in order to understand it thoroughly. The necessity of practice, or in other words, of obedience, is expressly declared by our Saviour in John 7: 17, where he says, that if any man does the will of God, he shall know of his doctrine, whether it be divine. This passage implies evidently, that without practicing obedience, the knowledge referred to will not be attained.

A man must practice morality in order to understand and appreciate the pure Gospel system, as it relates to this subject : He must in like manner practice the duties of religion if he would rightly understand and appreciate them, as taught in the Bible. Much of the error of the religious world, arises from a disposition to theorize without experiment. Theorists have not benefitted and adorned the walks of physical science, except so far as their theories have gone hand in hand with experiment ; and I apprehend that the same principle will hold true, in relation to the higher departments of moral and theological science.

Immorality blunts the moral sense, and in that way incapacitates men, in a measure, for the successful investigation of moral subjects. This is exemplified in the case of the drunkard, the sensualist, the thief, the liar, and every other class of immoral men, that can be named. There is no exception. It is no wonder, therefore, that such persons, while they continue such, should be unable to interpret correctly those parts of the Scriptures, which relate to a pure morality. It is their vice which obscures their intellectual and moral vision, that they cannot see. It is their vice which casts in dread eclipse the glorious sun of righteousness, so far as they are concerned, and shrouds them in fatal darkness. Every act of immorality contributes to harden the heart, to darken the mind, to stupify the conscience. Every act of impiety has the same effect. The hardening and blinding influence of impiety, is more concealed, than that of immorality ; but it is not more certain.



The moralist that lives an irreligious life, as every unconverted man does, is found to be as hardened and blinded in his irreligion as the sensualist, or gambler, or liar, is in his immorality.

When a man's objections to divine truth whether relating to morality or religion strictly so called, arise from immorality, or irreligion of heart and life, the soundest and most conclusive reasonings, if not directed against these real and proper causes of the error, are expended in vain.

4. Lastly, reduce your knowledge to system as fast as you acquire it. This can be done to a greater or less extent by every intelligent person, that is, by every one that has common intelligence. I would not flatter every Christian with the hope of becoming a profound divine. That attainment is perhaps within the reach of but few. But I would hold out to every one the hope of becoming a sound, intelligent Christian. Systematic knowledge is the most perfect knowledge. This holds true in relation to all subjects secular and religious. Those views of science which are not systematic, have never been considered as constituting adequate knowledge. When persons undertake to teach the sciences, they do it in a systematic manner. They cannot do it to advantage in any other manner. So when persons study the sciences, they generally study them systematically, beginning with the elementary principles, and ascending gradually and progressively to those parts which are abstruse and complicated. By proceeding in this manner every part of science is easy; but reverse the process, and not a single science would be attainable by ordinary capaci-

ties. The whole round of learning, which is now simple, and easily attained, if studied as many undertake to study the Bible, beginning with the darkest and most complicated portions of it, would be utterly unintelligible; and universal skepticism, or in other words, universal ignorance would unavoidably ensue. Begin, then, with the elementary principles of religion; learn them, and ascend gradually as you are able, to its higher and more difficult doctrines. In this way, the light of that which is simple, may be made to dispel the darkness, and remove the difficulties, in which more obscure portions of the word of God are involved.

Catechisms and well written systems of divinity may be of very essential service in the systematic study of the sacred Scriptures. It is on this ground that the use of such works by students in theology has been so generally approved by the pious and intelligent of different denominations. All intelligent Christians may use these to advantage, not as ultimate sources of information, but as helps to the systematic study of the Bible.

## RECOMMENDATORY LETTERS.

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The following letters from gentlemen whose studies have been directed to the subject of Interpretation, and who enjoy, in a high degree, the confidence of the Christian public, show in what light the foregoing work is viewed by their respective authors.

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REV. GEORGE BUSH, Professor of Hebrew and Oriental Literature, in the New-York University, writes as follows :

NEW-YORK, May 10, 1834.

MR. SAWYER :

DEAR SIR--At your request I have given an unavoidably hasty perusal to the little treatise on the Elements of Biblical Interpretation. Both the plan and the execution of the work in their general features meet my cordial approbation. Perhaps, indeed, if rigidly interrogated I might hesitate in giving a full assent to some few of its positions, as it is scarcely possible to invest the principles of this science, particularly as they relate to Prophecy and the Double Sense, with a demonstrative certainty. But on the whole I consider your work a valuable accession to the department to which it belongs. It is clear, simple, precise, well-reasoned and well-arranged—the first requisites in any elementary work. Being free from scholastic technicalities, it is well adapted to popular use, while the graver studies of the divine and the critic will be aided by its valuable hints.

Very respectfully yours,

GEORGE BUSH.

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REV. A. BARNES, of the First Church, Philadelphia.

MR. SAWYER.

I have at your request given a perusal to your little work on the Interpretation of the Scriptures. With the sentiments expressed by Prof. Bush in regard to it, I am

happy to concur. Such a work seems to me to be much demanded, and adapted to do much good. The great mass of Christians have not access to the larger works on this science; and yet nothing in my view, is more important in the promotion of humble, and enlightened piety than a correct knowledge of the laws of the interpretation of the Bible. Nothing, I am satisfied, will tend more to suppress wild, irregular, and fanatical views of divine truth, than such views of interpretation. To every effort, therefore, to promote such knowledge, I am happy to express my earnest wish of success.

Very respectfully yours,

ALBERT BARNES.

PHILADELPHIA, May 20, 1834.

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Rev. C. HODGE, Professor of Biblical and Oriental Literature in the Theological Seminary, Princeton.

To the Rev. Mr. SAWYER :

MY DEAR SIR,

As the sacred Scriptures are the only infallible guide to the knowledge of divine truth, it is evident, that their right interpretation is a matter of vital importance. It is not ministers alone to whom this interpretation belongs; it is at once the privilege and duty of every reader of the Bible to endeavor to ascertain its true meaning. I therefore rejoice that you have been led to prepare a work designed for the instruction of general readers on this important subject. As far as I have had the opportunity of examining your treatise, I think it well adapted to the object you have in view. The portions on the Double Sense, and the Interpretation of Prophecy, I have not read, and therefore cannot say how far our views on those points may differ.

Yours respectfully,

C. HODGE.



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